



A Gender Study of Franz Kafka and His Work ‘The Metamorphosis’

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Abstract:

The study of all of Franz Kafka's work with a gender-based concern has been central to the study of the author's text ever since the evolution of gender studies. *The Metamorphosis* by Kafka is his most significant work. A critical analysis of the characters of the novella, via the gender lens, unveils the social and political changes that Kafka encapsulates in his short prose about his time. This paper

attempts to evaluate a rereading of Kafka's text, its character and the metaphors in the story correlated with the author's biography. The same has been done with the help of Freudian reading, Beauvoirian reading, and theories, and arguments propounded by Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Butler, and a few other critics.

Keywords: Beauvoirian reading, feminism, Franz Kafka, Freudian reading, gender study, The Metamorphosis.

I. Introduction

Czech writer Franz Kafka is the greatest German literary figure since Goethe. He is considered one of the most influential names from the early 20th-century, shaping literature as well as worldview. His works like *The Trial*, *The Metamorphosis*, *In the Penal Colony*, *The Judgement*, and more paved the way for the absurdist writers like Camus, Sartre, Eugene Ionesco, and others who, inspired by his absurdist writings, defined the literature of the age.

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* stands amongst the greatest pieces of short prose fiction in literature. Nobel laureate Elias Canetti supported the said argument as he writes that the novella as a story was something that Kafka "could never surpass, because there is nothing which *Metamorphosis* could be surpassed by" (22). As a story, Kafka's work carries ambiguity and yet a certain sense of universality that allows superimposition of multiple theories, ideas, and analysis onto the very same text. Albert Camus, in his Appendix to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, titled "Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka" opens with: "The whole art of Kafka consists in forcing the reader to reread" (124). By allowing the multivalency of meaning, Kafka welcomes his readers to reread, and thereupon reanalyse his texts as new theories keep on emerging.

Robyn Wiegman claims that gender studies, as a theory in literary criticism, appeared with women's studies, and was its consequence too (18-37). It consolidated itself as an academic field proper in the 1970s. Kafka had passed away in 1924. However, both his works

and personality have been crucial topics of concern for feminist scholars ever since gender studies came into existence. A critical dissection of all the major characters from *The Metamorphosis* reveals the gender-based concern that Kafka was dealing with. An analytical study of Gregor's parents, correlated with Kafka's, establishes the gender role existing in society. Concurrently, an investigation into the characters of the siblings, namely Gregor and Grete, in the story, reveal the deviation from the norms of the parents.

II. A Gender Study of Kafka's Familial Ties Correlated With *The Metamorphosis*

Several critics, namely Anthony Northey, Margot Norris, Ronald Hayman, and David Cerfeda, argue about Kafka that the majority of his works find their primary source in his biography. Cerfeda even goes on to assert that "No analysis of Kafka's work would be effective without first understanding his life" (31). A critical and comparative study of Kafka's prose and his letters and diaries often reveal several commonalities that he works with. Max Brod—his friend and literary curator—was, in fact, unsure about the categorisation of his letters with respect to his literary works. French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari claim the inclusion of Kafka's letters as part of his literature in their work *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (591). *The Metamorphosis*, in particular, was written during the time Kafka began working in an office while still living with his family. A definite influence of his life finds a leak in the text as well. Ronald Hayman comments that Kafka, through the novella, has allegorised "his relationship with the family, building out from his sense of being a disappointment, a burden" (219). Therefore, a study of his familial background and nature of the relationship that Kafka shared with his parents exposes many hidden arguments that he, directly or indirectly, intends to make.

Franz Kafka took birth in Prague in the year 1883 to Hermann Kafka and Julie Lowy. The "German Jew" family consisted of six children of which Kafka was the only male to survive childhood

(Felisati and Sperati 328). He was fond of his three sisters, "particularly Ottla, the youngest" (Cerfeda 32). Hermann has been repeatedly described as a psychologically abusive authoritative figure for a father; his mother on the other hand, in stark contrast, is often termed to be too weak. Kafka often made a precise distinction between his maternal and paternal ancestry. While his father's side is often associated with being powerful and towering, traits usually associated with "masculinity", his mother is a quintessential figure of "femininity" and "Jewishness", from the nineteenth-century frame of reference (Kafka, *Letter to His Father* 159). A self-referential perspective of the parents is especially revealed in Kafka's letters, most effectively in *Letter to His Father*. Comparing himself and his behaviour with his parents, particularly his mother, he describes himself as "a Lowy with a certain basis of Kafka, which, however is not set in motion" (Kafka, *Letter to His Father* 159).

Dr. Lisa Seidnitz calls Kafka's father an "authoritative, patriarchal figure" ("Frieze Lecture: "The Metamorphosis" 100 years later"). The description is an echo of Kafka's perspective found in his aforementioned letter. Hermann had a huge influence on his son's life, occupation, personality, and even his writings. In his work, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, Max Brod exclusively mentions the father's influence in Kafka's stories (15, 17). In *Letter to His Father*, Kafka provides a much detailed description of his father, against the shorter one ascribed for the mother. He portrays him as "a true Kafka in strength, health, appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance, endurance, presence of mind, [and] knowledge of human nature" (Kafka, *Letter to His Father* 160). In comparison to the imposing analysis of the father, Kafka thinks himself to be too weak, slim, and constantly sick. He considers his father the standard and himself a deviation from the standard. Every difference between the two is, thus, a source of shame for Kafka which is evident from the words that he associates with his body with which "nothing could be achieved" (Kafka, *Letter to His Father* 167). The idolisation of Hermann as the antithesis to himself closely follows the description of a despot, who

reigns with his own arbitrary rules, but is typical of the father complex, which Jon E Roedecklein identifies as one of the aspects of the Oedipal Complex (111). A literary translation of the Oedipal fixation is seen in the father figures of *The Judgement* as Mr. Bendemann, *The Stoker* as Karl Rossman, and especially in *The Metamorphosis* as Mr. Samsa where the father, in a way, rediscovers his young self and even contributes in the moral and physical death of his son. The pattern of the father assuming an authoritative, potent, and active figure at the expense of his son is a common thread in Kafka's fiction. In his letters too, the same motif is visible by the way he addresses his father and even himself in comparison to him. He goes on to call himself a "slave", that has to "live under laws that had been invented only for [him]," which he can "never completely comply with" (Kafka, *Letters to His Father* 168). These "laws" that Kafka talks about are the laws that he believes are set by his father, as the despot of the house. Ernst Pawel, in his work *The Nightmare of Reason*, attempted a Freudian study of Kafka's relationship with his "bully" father. Pawel provides a dissection of Hermann's personality and Kafka's view of it. In the former image, Pawel describes him as a concerned father who is driven by the "fear of poverty and humiliation" and therefore wishes to control or rather "protect" him (384). On the other hand is Kafka's vision of him who is "omniscient, omnipotent [...] acting with [...] capricious malevolence. A very Jewish God" (Pawel 385). Kafka, himself, was exposed to the ideas of Freud. Luiz de Franca Costa Lima Neto calls Kafka "a careful and intelligent reader of Freud" (204). As a connoisseur of Freudian studies, Kafka attempts his analysis and thus, reconstructs several relationships in his works, especially the relationship with his father. In *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka fabricated the image of Mr. Samsa prompted by the vision of his father, whether consciously or unconsciously. In Part I of the novella, when the manager comes to check on Gregor while he is locked in his room, the father knocks on the door in front of everyone with his "fist", while shouting Gregor's name. At the same time, the knocks by the mother and sister were described as "cautious" and "light" respectively; his sister hiding in another room as she does so. The

two ladies try to whisper, in sharp contrast to the shouts of the father, while talking to Gregor. The juxtaposition of the knocks and whispers already situate the father as the authority in the house, despite being an inactive member of the family in the opening. Following that scene, as Gregor steps out of his room, in the non-human form, the father "clench[es] his fist with a hostile expression", then "grab[s] hold of the manager's cane" and "set[s] out to drive Gregor back into his room by waving the cane and the newspaper." (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 19-24). Kafka then goes on to equate the father's movements towards Gregor with that of "a wild man", "hissing" as he did so. By calling him "wild" and "man" he ascribes the primal masculine traits to Mr. Samsa who is beating his son as if he is a mere boy. The same happens again when Gregor steps out the second time. It becomes even more violent as the father is deliberately trying to hurt the son physically by throwing apples, as opposed to the first episode where he merely threatens. The physical charge taken by the father in both these scenes is a denotation of what Bergmann terms as the "Laius Complex" (293). It stands for the sadism and murderous wishes that a father or a mother feels towards his or her child. Bergmann even finds a parallel of it in the tradition of child sacrifice in the history of the Judeo-Christian religion. Devdutt Pattanaik identifies the father's will to destroy the son to sustain his youth as the "Yayati Complex" (Pattanaik). The father's resentment towards Gregor arises from having been replaced by the son as the care-taker of the house. This is even more evident from the act of hiding money from the family, which he reveals only after Gregor is no longer the care-taker. Although this early description of the father is rather more passive and elderly, he steps out of this image as he begins working once again. Undoubtedly, Mr. Samsa prefers the latter stage, which is evident from his refusal to remove his blue uniform, which is a representation of his professional function, and in a way, therefore, his youth and manliness. In the former stage too, he tries to maintain his authority over the women at least as is clear with these lines: "the father was accustomed to read the afternoon newspaper in a loud voice to his mother and sometimes also to his sister" (Kafka, *The*

Metamorphosis 20). By choosing to be the informer of the news, he is placing himself as the all-knowing male figure, through whom all the news must filter through to reach the ladies of the house. Corngold furthers this argument by citing Kimberly Sparks. He writes: "The person in power at any moment reads or manipulates the newspaper" (Corngold 102). Between the males, however, the same custom doesn't follow. The father probably does this to establish his authority with the women, as a gesture intended towards Gregor. Simone de Beauvoir, in her work *The Second Sex*, quotes Levi-Strauss and says: "The relationship of reciprocity [...] is not established between men and women, but between men by means of women ..." (83). Controlling the awareness of the women is the father's attempt to exhibit authority, which primarily, though, belongs to Gregor as the earner. Later there is a transfer of authority, upon the transfer of responsibility as the breadwinner, between the son and the father. A similar transfer is also seen in another father-son duo in *The Judgement*. Kafka sees his father in Mr. Samsa, who uses physical force, as an exhibition of his manliness, every time he drives Gregor back to his room in all the three parts of *The Metamorphosis*. Further, he even uses such force and authority, especially in Part III, where he has become the manliest character, against the boarders and the caretaker as well. The evolution of the father is put against the degradation of the son. *The Metamorphosis*, thus, enacts a visual representation of the Yayati complex. Kafka often saw his father's imposing authority as an impediment and a source of degradation for himself. Mr. Samsa's final state, at the end of story, is Hermann Kafka for Franz. Arunima Mazumdar wrote an article about the first-ever Virtual Reality experience of the novella. Mazumdar talks about the Czeck voice actors brought in to play the various characters of the story. She particularly mentions "Martin Švarc, who performed the voice of Samsa's father, used a specific accent in German that Kafka's father, Hermann Kafka, originally from Osek, a Jewish village in southern Bohemia, probably had too" ("I am Gregor Samsa"). This further stamps the similarity between the two fathers.

Against the over-imposing influence and stature of the father is Kafka's mother, Julie Lowy. Lowy too served as a chief influence in her son's fictional works. Women, in most of Kafka's works, are either inspired by his mother or are in complete opposition to her. The former projects an obedient, docile, and maternal figure; the latter is a free, sexual, and liberated individual, a dissection of whom would be seen later in the image of Grete. Pawel too describes the mother's passive and obedient nature in his work *The Nightmare of Reason*. Arthur Scherr, in "Maternal destructives in the life of Franz Kafka", goes on to talk about the "frustrated aggression, anxieties and insecurities" that Kafka was exposed to at the hands of Julie (262-278). Scherr asserts that her submissiveness was harmful for Kafka's psychological development. As was the norm at the time, she was a devout wife, full of compassion and affection towards her husband, agreeing and believing everything that he stated. Kafka mentions this in his *Letter to his Father*. He says, "she loved you too much ... over the years, Mother became ever more closely tied to you ... As the years passed, she came to adopt your [judgments] and condemnations of the children ever more blindly and completely, a matter not so much of reason as of feelings" (Kafka, *Letters to His Father* 183). An antithesis to the subdued wife, is another dimension to Julie's character, who was extremely sympathetic and encouraging towards her son. Pawel speaks of her "subterfuge" to hide her son's lacking against the stubborn nature of the father. He describes her as "skilled at evasive schemes, compromises and behind-the-scenes manipulations" (Pawel 238). She would often lie to Hermann regarding their son. In one particular incident, she even secretly employed her son-in-law's brother at a job, in the family asbestos company, that Hermann believed Kafka was supposed to do. Julie worked as an intermediary between Franz and Hermann. Kafka's letters were also routed through her. Max Brod in Kafka's biography reported that Julie never passed the letter to Hermann, but instead returned them to her son, probably afraid of what might come out of the act (Brod 127). Her passivity and submissiveness find an expression in the image of Gregor's mother in *The Metamorphosis*. In the image of the mother, Kafka intends to

represent the stereotypical and parallel of the woman figure that he saw in his mother. As a quintessential womanly character of yesteryear, the mother in the story has given up against the overarching patriarchal status quo, manifested in the strong figure of the father. In the characters of the father and even the sister, an evolvment and character-development are apparent. Conversely, the mother restricts herself in her passivity and her subsumed nature. In their landmark essay, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar exposed the textual dichotomy of the representation of women in works written primarily by male writers. They are either the "angel" in the house or "madwoman". Gregor's mother belongs to the former group. Carol Helmstetter Cantrell in her essay "The Metamorphosis: Kafka's Study of a Family" identifies the mother as the simplest role who is a "loving but weak person" (583). There are several examples in the text where Kafka reveals the mother's weakness, inadequacy, subversion, and failure. At the appearance of the manager, she is the one who mentions Gregor's illness to him, almost as an excuse for his absence, but to no avail. Later, she even gives an account of Gregor's routine to the manager again to exemplify and exaggerate his work-ethic and dedication, which doesn't work in Gregor's favour one more time, as he eventually gets fired. Despite her failures, her dedication, though, towards the well-being of Gregor is also apparent. She is the only one who holds on to the hope of Gregor's recovery. She even shows her reluctance to remove Gregor's furniture from his room, which, she feels, is an association to Gregor's humanity. However, there too she is subverted by the sister's desire to empty her brother's room. Cantrell adds that "her attempts are always doomed by her squeamishness" (583). Gregor's perception of her is of an old, inept, and domestic woman as he says to himself while considering the prospect of her getting a job: "a woman who suffered from asthma, for whom wandering through the apartment even now was a great strain and who spent every second day on the sofa by the open window laboring for breath" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 37). However, she does make a mark in one particular incident: at the closing of Part II, when Mr. Samsa is throwing apples at his son, the

mother rushes into the scene "in her undergarments" hurling herself onto the father almost as a display of sexual submission to beg "him to spare Gregor's life" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 52). Here too, one can read the influence of her sexuality rather than her reasoning, skills, or perseverance. On the other hand, as has been mentioned earlier, the father's desire to murder Gregor roots out of the Yayati Complex. Therefore, his violence toward his son is an expression of establishing domination. Beauvoir, in this regard, states: "...throughout humanity, superiority has been granted not to the sex that gives birth, but to the one that kills" (76). In this scene, the violence shown by Mr. Samsa, who is a shadow of Hermann Kafka, is to establish authority over everyone including Mrs. Samsa, a shadow of Julie Bowry. Another commonality between the fictional and the author's mother that J Brooks Bouson identifies is "his alienation from his mother." Bouson cites Margarete Mitscherlich-Nielsen's psychoanalytic analysis of Kafka's childhood offering an "interesting speculation on Kafka's early relationship with his mother, pointing to a disturbance in the early mother-child relationship" (192-212). The mother, in the story, abandons Gregor by allowing Grete to become his sole caretaker. Gregor on the other side maintains his alienation by refusing the milk, a symbol of motherhood. Kafka describes Gregor's detestation towards the symbol as he writes that the milk "did not appeal to him at all" and he instead turns "away from the bowl almost with aversion" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 28). In the same manner of this alienating phase for Gregor, Kafka's mother, as Cerfeda points out, was not present and active in his formative years (33). As was typical in child upbringing in those years, Kafka, along with the other children was left to be educated by maids and servants. These parallels reveal that the mother was indeed Kafka's manifestation of his idea of motherhood, even if he didn't intend it that way. She is central to the construction and even understanding of women and especially mothers in the majority of the texts. Nancy J Chodorow argues that mother is the prime example of "womanhood" in a child's life, and thereafter, shapes their future idea and model of women (85, 104). The same is evident in Kafka's texts too.

III. A Gender Study of Gregor's Gender Transformation Correlated with Kafka's

Kafka began writing at a time of significant and rapid cultural changes, amongst which, one of the most pivotal ones was women's liberation movements. These movements, by opening doors for women, began challenging the prevalent gender norms in society. The right to vote, working rights, and inclusion into universities for women started changing the world for them, and as a consequence, for men as well. Along with the changes in the social and political milieu, a vast change was also being observed in the personal sphere as the works of Freud introduced the understanding of sexuality and thus, transformed its definition as well. All of this combined was rapidly posing questions on gender roles and gender norms, and their validity. Correlating these changes with Kafka, Cerfeda writes, "Although Kafka was not specifically interested in ... [social] changes, his works encompass the concept of social change itself, the idea of marginal or oppressed identities that become conscious and explicit and look for their place in society" (2). A societal change in the definition of normality affected everything, and therefore, Kafka's literature too. Cerfeda's idea of the "marginal or oppressed identities" finds an echo in Kafka's own life. The German-speaking population in Prague was a minority. The Jewish population within that populace is a minority within a minority. John Updike in his foreword to *The Complete Stories by Franz Kafka* writes "The Jews of Prague generally spoke German, and this was added to their racial and religious minority-status a certain linguistic isolation as well ..." (13). Saul Friedlander too underlines Kafka's coming into his "maturity" as a German-speaking Jew in anti-Semitic Prague--that is, "a minority twice over ..." (25). The twofold marginalisation is parallel to the condition of women within every minority, which Shailaja Paik in her book *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India* calls "double discrimination" (1). Sander Gilman even equates the Jewish identity with femininity, from the nineteenth-century viewpoint. He writes, "the body of the male Jew was marked as different from his European counterparts in fin-de-

siècle culture by his circumcision, his (perceived) infirmity, and his stereotypically feminized appearance" (Gilman 54). Gilman's proposition is an echo of what Beauvoir meant when she wrote: "'The eternal feminine' corresponds to 'the black soul or 'the Jewish character'" (12). Thus, the "double discrimination" somehow allows Kafka to separate himself from the strict masculine prototype and have a comparatively better understanding of the non-masculine identities.

Kafka often resolves to a vague or distorted vision when he wishes to go against the norm. Oliver Tearle, in his book *The Secret Library*, describes how Kafka "ordered that the creature must not be drawn at any cost" keeping "the vagueness" a "part of the effect" (239). Tearle also mentions the use of the German word "Ungeziefer", which he says "does not lend itself easy to translation" (239). The writer's inclination towards an unclear vision of Gregor's transformation in the story also speaks of its gender transformation, which consequently appears to be more fluid than the accepted norm. Cerfeda notes a similar example from a theatrical performance of another text by Kafka, called *The Trial*, in which everyone but the protagonist is wearing a mask because of a lack of identifiable role in society. The lack of mask situates the character outside the objective groups of society including their social gender identity (Cerfeda 59). The distortion of the standard is therefore an aesthetic intention by Kafka to blur the norms.

As has been discussed earlier, the differences between him and his father that he wrote about in *Letter to his Father*, reveal Kafka's view of himself which he sees in opposition to his "masculine" father, and thus to the whole gender as well. His own identity is therefore a blur: "Lowy with a certain basis of Kafka", as quoted above. Cerfeda also writes about the "conflicted relationship between Kafka and sexuality, a theme so obviously complicated that Kafka admitted in his own letters to struggle with it ..." (12).

Kafka's self-deviation from what he considers the gender-norm is similar to his character-based gender deviation. The theme of sexuality, or its deviation, finds a recurrent mention in Kafka's

novels where the protagonist has to struggle with their identity, which has a sexual or gender-based concern too. A lot of characters in these novels either go through a gender shift or are themselves a deviation of the gender-norm already, pointing to the possibility that gender in the Kafkaesque world is not fixed at all. Following the lines of Simone De Beauvoir and Judith Butler: every sex can be any gender. Butler in her work *Gender Trouble* writes: "gender is not written on the body as the torturing instrument of writing in Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" inscribes itself unintelligibly on the flesh of the accused" (202). She claims that gender is a performative function of the body upon which biological sex is attributed at the time of the birth. She correlates it with *In the Penal Colony*, in which Kafka shows an old masochistic punishing machine in which the condemned person is placed without being aware of their crime. Their crimes are instead inscribed on their bodies by using a series of needles set in the very machine. Butler uses this work to equate the said punishment as a metaphor for gender attribution, where one is not aware of the identity imposed upon them. One performs a gender, without being aware of the standard performance and, therefore, there is no gender standardisation. Nina Pelikan Straus, in her seminal essay adds that "Kafka puts traditional attitudes regarding gender on trial and deconstructs the reader's expectation as well" (652). He manages to abandon the two gender dichotomy which allows his characters to transcend performances outside of their gender. The deviation discussed above is more prominently seen in characters that are autobiographical or even semi-autobiographical. Through a study of familial ties, Kafka's biographical details are essentially revealed in the character of Mr. and Mrs. Samsa. Similarly, Kafka is represented through Gregor. Straus writes that "the story of Gregor is a parabolic reflection of Kafka's own self-exposure and self-entombment" (653). She further states that the work "engaged Kafka in deep self-scrutiny regarding his gender and sexual identity" (Straus 659). It is through the character of Gregor that Kafka exhibits his own condition. In an article, Susan Bernofsky, who also wrote an English translation of the work, talks about the probable inspiration of *The*

Metamorphosis. She writes: "On November 17, 1912, Kafka wrote to his fiancée Felice Bauer that he was working on a story that "came to me in my misery lying in bed" and now was haunting him" (Bernofsky).

The story of *The Metamorphosis* itself deals with the introduction of a character's "misery lying in bed". A study of Kafka's letters and diaries reveal his interest in the idea of death and suicide. The powerlessness and helplessness in the face of adversity, absurdity, and catastrophe is often seen resolved in the form of suicide or at least the death of most of Kafka's main character. Bernofsky compares the tragic deaths of *The Metamorphosis* and *Death of a Salesman*. She writes, "*The Metamorphosis* is Kafka's own *Death of a Salesman*, with all the sad, grubby tragedy, all the squalor." She also compares the two protagonists as she says "Willy Loman, Gregor is a suicide, though of a different sort: he dies a hunger artist, perishing of starvation because nothing tastes good to him anymore. And like Willy's, Gregor's death is the final service he performs for the benefit of his family" (Bernofsky). However, Gregor's suicide at the end of the novella is not just for the supernatural transformation that has happened before the beginning of narration but also for the gender transformation that he goes through during the narration. Throughout the text, Kafka deviates Gregor's gender identity against the norm that he displays in Mr. Samsa. Eventually, as Gregor moves further and further from this identity he has no way out but death.

At the beginning of the story, when Gregor wakes up transformed as the "Ungeziefer", he retains his gender. Sokel states that Samsa never really calls "himself a cockroach", for him he's still Gregor: the son, the brother and the travelling salesman (Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis* 46-47). Sweeney in his work asserts that "the transformation is at this stage psychologically incomplete" (140). Therefore, his self-identity, which obviously entails his gender, is intact. It is evident from the fact that the very first thought that occurs to him, upon being confronted with such life-threatening absurdity, is that of his delay for work. He has no concern about his

physical transformation. Straus writes that, "the first image in the story's first paragraph suggests a man buried in an insect body" (661), while Sweeney says that "Gregor is a consciousness disembodied from his original body and locked into an alien organism" (140). He is still the provider of the family, and therefore this absurdity primarily attacks his status as the breadwinner rather than his well-being. The arrival of the manager is also a question of a man not being able to show up for his work. His co-worker is a representation of the workplace, traditionally a male sphere. The manager appears at Gregor's first absence, after years of service which shows that illness is an inexcusable offence. While speaking to the mother who boasts of Gregor, the manager says, "I must also say that we business people, luckily or unluckily, however one looks at it, very often simply have to overcome a slight indisposition for business reasons" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 13). Cerfeda finds a gender dichotomy between work and illness. He says, "as work is a male feature, a non-working individual like Gregor is not a male any longer. Illness does not justify a day off, because, as mentioned, illness is a feminine trait and would therefore indicate an intrusion of roles if it took priority over masculine traits, like Gregor is allowing to happen" (Cerfeda 70). The dramatic irony in this particular scene is useful to provide a gender study of society. While the reader is aware of Gregor's predicament inside the room, the manager is not. Therefore, his attack against Gregor throughout this scene is directed at Gregor's manhood. Gregor too loses a sense of his predicament when he is threatened by the manager who goes on to the extent of complaining about Gregor's bad performance at the job in front of his parents. At this point, Gregor, with all his might, begins operating at the door as an insect while reasoning about the tragedy as if he was a human. He believes that once he's able to open the door and explain his situation, he can catch the next train to come for work. Gregor is aware that his family relies on his work, and therefore on his masculinity, to survive; a criticism of which shows his lack as a man. This prompts Gregor to turn the lock and appear in the transformed state in front of the manager and his family. The manager, upon seeing Gregor, is horrified and runs

away. It is at this point that Gregor has officially lost his job and therefore his manliness too. From this point onward in the story, one sees the gradual transformation of Gregor from the breadwinner to a burden, from male to female, as one would perceive in Kafka's society.

As the time passes and the family grows more accustomed to sharing the living quarters with Gregor's strange form, Grete becomes his caretaker, a reversal of what is shown in Gregor's memories, where he took care of Grete's needs. Throughout the story henceforth, the reader is revealed to Gregor's "metamorphosis" essentially concerning his gender. Like a non-masculine identity, he is faced with discrimination, marginalisation, and degradation as he is put away from his previous state further and further. Kafka intensifies this description of a burden by the physical attributes that he associates with Gregor. He has no real teeth, he rocks to and fro and finds difficulty in walking. Further, there is also a discharge of uncontrolled body fluid from his body. All these descriptions position him away from the idea of a masculine prototype. His masculinity, in a way, is being neutered and even infantilised. Straus comments on the structure of the novel as she says, "Kafka's text is structured to represent systematically, in the most concrete terms possible, the process by which Gregor's male identity is demolished" (663). This demolition reaches its completion when Gregor attains the state of gender neutrality. Upon his third visit outside his room, Grete's frustration with Gregor's unmanliness leads her to refer to him as a "thing": an "it". "We must try to get rid of it" she exclaims, "it is killing you both. I see it coming. When people have to work as hard as we all do, they cannot also tolerate this endless torment at home" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 68). Here, Grete is criticising the burdensome "thing" for its inability to contribute anything in the house, against the traditional a male role that Gregor once held. He is supposed to be the patriarchal inheritor of not only the power but also the responsibility. His sister's denouncement of him as a mere "thing" is the objectification of Gregor out of humanity, and even masculinity.

Apart from the constant gender-transformation done by the use of dialogues and storyline in the plot, Kafka also employs the use of several metaphors, imageries, and symbolism that are gendered as well. The description of the painting of the woman in his room appears several times in the story. Mark Anderson underlines the sexual imagery suggested in the portrait. In his work, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornaments and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siecle*, he talks about the relief Gregor finds for "his hot belly" upon the touch of the woman's painting, which is a "metaphor for sexual desire" (123-144). This incident suggests Gregor's last physical contact with a woman. Kafka, now and again, describes the portrait of the lady, enclosed in fur. The painting finds its first mention by the mother when she's speaking to the manager. Straus calls the painting "vaginal and furry" (661). Gregor's possession of it represents his erotic response to women, the desire to stick the phallic "forearm" into a fur muff, evidently sexual imagery. Therefore, his sudden resistance towards his sister, who may remove the lady's portrait, is Gregor's fight against the taking of his manhood.

Another picture that finds a detailed description is of Gregor from the past. Kafka provides an emblematic juxtaposition, between the current state and the previous one, as he particularly mentions Gregor's photograph in his military uniform. He writes, "Direct across on the opposite wall hung a photograph of Gregor from the time of his military service; it was a picture of him as a lieutenant, as he, smiling and worry free, with his hand on his sword, demanded respect for his bearing and uniform" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 20). By laying stress on the spatial positioning of the photograph, Kafka also puts the symbolical manly image of the military-man in complete diametrical opposition to Gregor's current state.

Kafka's imagery of the whole room can be read via the gender lens as well. Norman N Holland in his essay points out the sexual symbolism of the "double door" which provides "a birth image" (149-50). The room, as per Holland, symbolises a womb for Gregor.

Concurrently, it also represents an escape or a refuge for him where except for Gregor, no males are allowed. In the story, we only see the mother, the sister, and the cleaning woman enter the room. The manager's intrusion, therefore, resembles the invasion of the male working environment over Gregor's individuality, which is going through a gender-transformation. The father, too, never enters the room, except at the end when Gregor has lost all of his masculinity, along with his life. After his passing, the room loses its value as a gendered metaphor. Upon Gregor's death, even the three gentlemen, who also represent the male gender, are also brought into the room. Sweeney, in his analysis, calls the room "a philosophical metonymy for Gregor's private mentality" (142). This mentality, having faced a gender-crisis, goes under a transformation throughout the text.

Another juxtaposition of Gregor against prototype masculinity is via the use of these three renters in the house. The three cigar-smoking gentlemen contain a phallic identity. The first being the "cigar" itself. Peter Dow Webster even compares the trio with "the masculine genitals" where the middle one always speaks and the other two identical fellows follow. Webster furthers his argument by saying "As phallic entities they object to any vestigial analism; they have a special antipathy for dirt" (362). Kafka's description of them is also vividly masculine, which is further used to emphasise Gregor's distance from them: "These solemn gentlemen (all three had full beards as Gregor once found out through a crack in the door) ..." (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 60). While Gregor is restricted to his non-male sphere, the three take up the central space at the dinner table where Gregor once sat. They are even served meat while Gregor is starving. He says to himself: "How these lodgers stuff themselves, and I am dying" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 62) The sharp contrast is pointed out by Cerfeda: "Food is gendered: those who eat meat are men and healthy, while those who eat something else are emasculated, perverted like Gregor as an insect ..." (79). He also points out that "fasting is, stereotypically, a feminine activity. By identifying his male main characters [...] with a female act, Kafka is perverting one key aspect

of his characters' sex. Fasting becomes so important to some of them that [...] their fate is sealed by it (as in the case of Gregor, who dies of starvation)" (Cerfedda 76).

Sokel cites Johannes Urzidil's recollection of what "Kafka said to [him]: 'To be a poet means to be strong in metaphors. The greatest poets were always the most metaphorical ones'" (Sokel, "Rebellion and Punishment" 22). Thus, metaphors play a huge role in Kafka's depiction of gender transformation and fluidity in the case for Gregor. In fact, all of Kafka's prose is rich in symbols, metaphors, references, and allegories that find a mention in the text consciously and subconsciously. Gregor's gender "metamorphosis" is also shown through the use of metaphors, most of them related to Gregor only, as this transformation, in the story, is most crucial to him. The loss of his ability to work, make money, and provide for his family transforms him into a burden, which nobody, including Gregor, can bear. The failure and the subsequent giving up of the protagonist is a common motif employed by Kafka. All of Kafkaesque men, a group that also enlists Kafka himself, are faced with horror and absurdity in the course of their life and as a result of that, they begin losing their identity. Especially in the two particular cases of Gregor and Kafka, this loss of identity also concerns their gender.

IV. A Gender Study of Grete's Identity and the Real Metamorphosis of *The Metamorphosis*

A gender-based study of *The Metamorphosis* is unaccomplished without the review of Grete's character. As Gregor's sister, she serves as the perfect foil for him, as she mirrors her brother's "metamorphosis" and also shows the extent of damage done by the unequal gender power structure in a hegemonic familial setting that is rooted in a capitalistic modern society. Cerfedda dissects the cinematic translation of the text, as he writes: "In the 2012 adaptation, after the chief clerk has run away and Gregor's father has sent Gregor back to his room and before fading to the next scene in Gregor's room, a seemingly analogic cut from the insect to Grete's worried face suggests the two are linked" (76). Kafka even

duplicates their names as "Gregor" and "Grete" to further their association with each other. In an analysis done by Gerhard Rieck, it is revealed that Kafka often works with "irreconcilable personalities" who form "couples" (104-25). These couples, as Rieck claims, are usually made up of one passive and austere personality, and another active and libidinal one; the two are then compared and contrasted with each other. However, the motif of exchange continues with these two characters as well, as it did with Gregor and his father. Grete also undergoes a transformation of her own, and Gregor's initial transformation, therefore, becomes a foreshadowing and reflection for Grete's. Straus in her essay talks about "Grete's metamorphosis" as she claims that "it is Grete, woman, daughter, sister, on whom the social and psychoanalytic resonances of the text depend" (652). Grete's performance serves as the antithesis to Gregor's. An analytical approach to the structure of the text reveals itself to be "hourglass-shaped", as Straus claims, where the two characters interchange roles, personalities, and powers as the plot progresses. Kafka even brilliantly manages this by dedicating the opening and closing paragraphs of the text to Gregor and Grete respectively. While Gregor "had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug", Grete, on the other hand, "had blossomed recently [...] into a beautiful and voluptuous young woman" (77). Further, the use of past tense in Gregor's context suggests that his "metamorphosis" is complete even before the first word. Conversely, Grete's transformation is slow, continuous, and occurs in the process of textual progression.

Several critics even claim that the story is not about Gregor at all. The titular "metamorphosis" is, in fact, Grete's transformation from being the passive, submissive, and dormant girl to an active, independent, and assertive woman. Kafka even puts her on the edge of ageing evolution by situating her at seventeen years, where after a short time she is supposed to be legally called a "woman" rather than a "girl". In the short span that is presented in the story Grete "becomes a woman" in the Beauvorian sense (293). On the other hand, Dr. Lisa Seidnitz in her lecture terms Gregor's transformation

as a regression instead, as it "is done in the reverse direction". She addresses this from a biological standpoint, where she claims, "metamorphosis" or transformation is "progressive in most cases" (Seidnitz). However, Gregor who "was a human being who could stand upright and could move" is transformed into "this thing that creeps low to the ground...and he is debased" ("Frieze Lecture: "The Metamorphosis" 100 years later"). Sokel calls Gregor's metamorphosis as the "counter-metamorphosis" achieved by the transformation of the metaphor. On the other hand, Cerfeda points out the cinematic representation of Grete's transformation, done through her looks. He says: "Prevraschenie shows this change very clearly by giving Grete a uniform, a tidier, less feminine haircut and a less childish behaviour" (Cerfeda 77). The regressive modification of Gregor, although appears as the primary metamorphosis, is the misdirection done by Kafka to camouflage Grete's metamorphosis in the text. This transformation also remained hidden for years after the publication of the text because of the domination of masculinity in literary circles. Strauss writes that "Because the mirror of "Metamorphosis" has usually reflected masculinist attitudes and orientations, Grete's plight and role have been subsumed by the paradigm of male alienation" (654). Grete's "metamorphosis" becomes more and more central to the story as the literary circle progresses towards gender equality, which was not possible earlier.

The inspiration for Grete's character comes from many women in Kafka's life. Elias Canetti correlates Kafka's life with his texts in the work *Kafka's Other Trial: The Letters to Felice*. Canetti studies Kafka's relationship with three important women from his life, namely Felice Bauer, Milena Jesenka, and Grete Block (12-13). The third name, as critics suspect, is the origin of Grete Samsa's name. Straus and Pawel, in their respective studies, also claim Ottla, Kafka's sister, to be the origin of Grete. Kafka, who seemed, and felt, helpless, small and dormant in comparison to the towering image of his father, often imagined a powerful woman empowering him, which he writes about in his diaries. "With my sisters--and this was especially true in the early days--I was often an altogether

different person than with other people. Fearless, vulnerable, powerful, surprising, moved as I otherwise only am when I am writing" (Pawel 86). In particular, his youngest sibling Ottla did all that Kafka dreamed of doing himself: she rebelled, defied the father, broke away from home, and even married a non-Jew. Kafka's relationship with Ottla can be superimposed upon Gregor's relationship with Grete, especially at the end of the novella, as masculine disorientation occurs in both. The two sisters stepped out of their social role and assumed positions that were unheard-of for women. Consequently, an analogous analysis of Gregor's gender shift is also possible with Grete's. A few critics also point out a few instances where they spot the acquisition of masculine traits in Grete's identity as she goes out of her supposed gender role. Wollstonecraft, in this regard, talks about women's "imitation of manly virtues". She says: "... attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind; - all those who view them with a philosophical eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine" (Wollstonecraft 19). Wollstonecraft's argument is pointed against the gender fixation. When she uses the term "masculine", it is not the biological identity, but gender-based instead. She even goes on to term women who stepped out of the "prescribed orbits" as "male spirits", which again is a comment on the gender and not the sex (69). Grete, in Wollstonecraft's terms, grows more and more "masculine."

As has been discussed earlier, the time at which the text was written is pivotal as it also serves as the turning point in women's history globally. It could be said that the whole gender was undergoing a "metamorphosis". In the early 1900s, women were slowly making their way to becoming equivalent to their gender counterparts. With the advent of rights and opportunities, they also had a bigger variety of occupations at their disposal. Especially during the First World War, women served as cooks, mechanics, and even in police forces. However, at the same time, they were also tied to domestic duties,

unlike men. This is true in Grete's case as well. She evolves from her brother's description of her "a girl who was still a seventeen-year-old child" (37) into "into a beautiful and voluptuous young woman" (77). While in the latter state, she has to apply herself to several tasks of household, her job, and even her musical interests. Considering the patriarchal structure that Kafka reveals through the course of the book, Gregor wouldn't have applied himself to domestic chores had Grete transformed into a bug. Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* asserts that it is the woman who "is condemned to domestic labour" (75). She equates the domesticity of women as the reciprocity of the master-slave relationship. Talking about single women particularly, just as Grete was, Beauvoir asserts that "the single woman most often remains a servant in the father's, brother's or sister's household" (155). They do not "escape the traditional feminine world" (155). Their identity lies linked to the household or with the men of the household. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, criticises the misogynistic claims of Genevan philosopher Jean-Jaques Rousseau. She ironically writes, "Connected with man as daughters, wives, [sisters] and mothers, their [women's] moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those duties" (Wollstonecraft 53).

The question of identity plagues *The Metamorphosis* as Gregor's character loses his identity progressively during the course of the story. Grete also suffers from this very plague at the beginning of the story, which she then overcomes eventually. However, her identity would not have been revealed had Gregor not suffered the tragedy. Straus confirms this as she writes: "For Kafka there can be no change without an exchange, no blooming of Grete without Gregor's withering" (657-658). Following this argument, at the beginning of the novella, she is hardly given notice by Gregor or even the narrator. She is often addressed as "Gregor's sister" rather than by her name. It is but a woman, her mother, who calls out "Grete! Grete!" to summon her, that reveals her name to the reader (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 16). Beauvoir, in her work, writes: "Humanity is male, and man defines women not in herself, but in

relation to himself" (5). Grete's identity remains subsumed under her relationship with Gregor, at the beginning at least. Kafka again flips this at the end when Grete says: "I will not utter my brother's name in front of this monster ..." (67-68). This is the first and the only time that Gregor is defined by his relation to her, rather than the other way around, and it had to be Grete to take the charge to do this, rather than the narrator. Evelyn Torton Beck goes further and applies a Marxist-Engelian approach towards the text to conclude that Kafka's treatment of women was rather "patriarchal" as he addresses Gregor as "Samsa" but to Grete as "Grete" (566). As the patriarchal inheritor in the family, Gregor automatically also inherits the family-identity: their last name, which is never given to Grete, even after his death. In addition to names, identity-diminution can also be achieved via trivialising someone as a "child". A repeated reference to Grete's childhood is done by Gregor, their father, and even the narrator. Wollstonecraft writes that "when the epithet [of child/children] is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term for weakness" (43). Accordingly, when Gregor mentions or thinks about Grete's childishness, he is infantilising her, and depriving her of her identity as a grown and self-sufficient woman. Another illustration of identity debasement is seen through the symbol of Grete's violin. At the start of the story, it is revealed in Gregor's reverie that "it was his secret plan to send her next year to the conservatory ..." (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 65). Although, throughout the novel, it is insinuated that Grete has a certain inclination towards playing music but it is never really revealed if she wanted a career out of it. Furthermore, Gregor and the narrator also don't tell the reader about Grete's awareness of Gregor's aforementioned "secret plan". Gregor decides her career, and therefore her identity, for her. Concerning the violin, another scene occurs when a male takes the charge and decides for Grete. In Part III, when the three gentlemen demand Grete to play the violin for them, treating her as mere entertainment, the father thanks them, "as if he were the one playing the violin" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 63). At this point in the story, the three men assume the manliest position in the house, therefore the father, without a sense of consent from Grete, answers on her behalf to

satisfy these socially high-placed men. In Part III, Grete lets the violin symbolically fall after placing it on her mother's lap. Its "reverberating tone" is strong, sudden, and in sharp contrast with the "charming" play of her violin earlier.

Following the revelation of her brother as the transformed bug, Grete diligently works towards acquiring her identity. As mentioned before, she is the one who takes charge to be the caretaker of Gregor. She starts by experimenting with Gregor's dietary choices: "She brought him, to test his taste, an entire selection, all spread out on an old newspaper" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 31). While doing this, she gradually transforms from being a child to Gregor to his surrogate-mother who feeds him. Straus points out that "Grete is the carrier of nourishment (initially milk, then cheese) upon which Gregor greedily sucks" (660-61). Grete is the symbolical mother who takes care of a sickly and degenerate child. This becomes her first act in the process of her own "metamorphosis". Every fragment of Gregor's deterioration henceforth is an added evolution towards Grete's transforming personality. The more he depends on her, the more she evolves. Straus also writes about this relationship: "He must submit his masculine prerogative to her. He must eat what she gives him ... scuttle under the sofa so that she is protected from the sight of him, even though he finds this difficult because "the large meal had swollen his body" ... and he must remain there in deference to her" (664). Straus further talks about the relinquishing of Gregor's "male status" that is acquired by Grete. She writes: "The sentence "In this manner Gregor was fed" ... highlights, even in its grammar, his passive, dependent relation to her and indicates the moment in the text when Gregor's degradation and gradual disappearance are finally exchanged for Grete's social upgrading and visibility" (Straus, 664).

A pivotal point in the process of Grete's "metamorphosis" occurs when Grete assumes the decisional positions and declares that the furniture must be removed. Here, she goes against her mother's demands of keeping the furniture intact who connects it with Gregor's humanity and in a way his previous position of power as a

male. However, Grete takes charge to alter the status quo and they begin removing it. Gregor remains hidden and passive throughout this scene, pointing to his diminished masculinity, except when Grete is approaching the portrait of the woman in fur. Straus notes that "Grete's decision to deprive him of the picture is perhaps motivated by her sense that it represents a pornographic image of women against which she has rebelled and to which Gregor still clings ..." (665). Gregor's surrender of the picture would have been symbolic of the abandonment of his male prerogative to exploit women's sexual image. Concurrently, the act is symbolic for Grete as well who by diminishing Gregor's prerogative is establishing her authority. Upon the mother's unconscious fall, caused by Gregor's sudden appearance from his hiding, Grete's reaction is symbolic again: "'Gregor, you ...,' cried out his sister with a raised fist and an urgent glare. Since his transformation those were the first words which she had directed right at him" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 47-48). Here, Grete decides to verbally abuse Gregor, which she then doesn't voice, but certainly feels. By doing this, she holds Gregor accountable for the incident that happened to the mother. Ashley Montague claims that swearing arises from a feeling of frustration. Swearing, as per Montague, is an innate expression of anger (189-201). Grete's anger, voiced by Kafka, in the form of the curtailed curse, represents her innate annoyance with Gregor as a whole, and not just that act. Her "raised fist" further stamps and amplifies her annoyance in the corporeal sense too. Mary Coble provides a dissection of this "fistivism". She writes, "The raised fist has been an iconic marker of minorities' fights against oppression – minorities of not only sexual orientation but also of gender, race, class, and ethnicity" (Coble). With her raised fist, Grete announces her rebellion against the patriarchal oppression represented in the figure of Gregor.

Following this episode, Grete continues to demonstrate her passive frustration towards her brother by not feeding him. What also occupies her meanwhile is her job. Beauvoir writes: "It is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap

separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom" (737). As Grete continues working and gradually stops being Gregor's caretaker, she seeks her emancipation through her work. It is via her working sphere that she manages to find an ulterior identity. Kafka, shows a hidden opposition by Gregor against Grete's work-identity as Gregor thinks to himself: "Should his sister earn money, a girl who was still a seventeen-year-old child, whose earlier life style had been so very delightful that it had consisted of dressing herself nicely, sleeping in late, helping around the house, taking part in a few modest enjoyments and, above all, playing the violin?" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 37). This is analogous to Gregor's idea for his mother's work as well. With Grete, he goes an extent further and enlists effeminate tasks and activities that occupy Grete's day, according to him. Even after she begins working, she never really achieves the bread-earner status that Gregor once held. Beauvoir deals with the idea of women's work as she writes: "bound to her father's or husband's household, she is most often satisfied just to bring home some extra money; she works outside the family, but for it ..." (136). A woman's income is considered a mere "extra" in a patriarchal familial setup, while the man is supposed to be earning the essential income needed for the sustenance of the household. At the same time, "tasks carried out in a [workplace] do not free them from household chores" (Beauvoir 738). Domestic labour becomes a gender role that women have to comply with. This is reflected in Grete's character too.

While she manages her job along with domestic duties, she is not able to take care of Gregor as she did earlier. Further, the withdrawal of Grete's service makes Gregor dirtier and less human. At the same time, she continues to grow more determined and self-confident. This is also a cause for Gregor's deterioration. Physically he is thwarted by his father's abuse, while mentally it is his awareness of Grete's growth that breaks his spirits. Cerfeda argues that "Gregor cannot cope with the social battle caused by the re-consideration of gender and the feminist movements advocating for better social conditions for women" (76). Gregor's physical and social conditions

worsen with every passing day. Kafka describes this: "Streaks of dirt ran along the walls; here and there lay tangles of dust and garbage" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 57-58). He then goes on to talk about Grete's contribution in the same, despite Gregor's protest of his ill-conditions: "At first, when his sister arrived, Gregor positioned himself in a particularly filthy corner in order with this posture to make something of a protest. But he could have well stayed there for weeks without his sister's changing her ways. Indeed, she perceived the dirt as much as he did, but she had decided just to let it stay" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 58). Grete's indifference towards this scene contributes to her evolution and at the same time towards Gregor's deterioration. In Part III, both the "metamorphosis" are completely achieved as Grete slams her fist on the table, a loud noise sharply in contrast to the whispers she was allotted at the beginning of the story, and decrees that "We must get rid of it ..." (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 68). Her father agrees, but it is evident that she is the decision-maker in the scene. Her pronouncement and insistence to rid Gregor of his identity as a human and a male, stamps her own identity.

Grete's transformed state and identity are further shown in another scene. Just before Gregor's death as he slowly moves "to creep back into his room", he stops at the door to turn around and look behind him. Kafka then writes: "Only the sister was standing up." (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 70). This is emphasised to reveal the altered status quo of the house. Kafka packs another symbolic scene following this as: "Hardly was he [Gregor] inside his room when the door was pushed shut very quickly, bolted fast, and barred. Gregor was startled by the sudden commotion behind him, so much so that his little limbs bent double under him. It was his sister who had been in such a hurry" (Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* 70-71). The door symbol is ubiquitous in literature. In her comparative study of Harold Pinter's *Homecoming* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Emily Hoffman asserts that Nora in *A Doll's House* left her husband and children and shut the door behind her, the sound of which was a

pointer to the women of the future (25). In *The Metamorphosis*, Grete takes up the task to shut the door herself replicating Nora's act.

Through the death of her brother, in the very next scene, Grete embodies her re-birth. A complete inversion of the "hourglass" posits Grete as the judge of the house and Gregor as the banished entity, decreed by the judge herself. Grete's re-birth is the pronouncement of Gregor's ultimate death. As opposites, they have attained their final mark at which point Gregor, being the antithesis to Grete cannot co-exist with her and therefore must die.

V. Conclusion

The gender-based analysis of the four main characters of *The Metamorphosis* is essentially revealing in Kafka's understanding of gender-identity, its transformation and its collapse. Kafka uses the parents to build the gender structure, and then uses their kids to bring that structure down. In the image of the father, he produces the pattern for masculine identity, and then deviates sharply from the pattern with the image of the son continuously throughout the text. He follows a similar model for the women too, as he produces the ideal woman in his mother and juxtaposes her with the image of the daughter who revolts against the former figure. A juxtaposition is also seen amongst the siblings where after breaking the gender norms, there is a steady flow from one end to the other. *The Metamorphosis*, therefore, becomes a text of gender transformation seen in all the major characters of the story.

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